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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - President Bush Press
Conference European Issues - Turkey
PARIS - Wednesday, October 05, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

President Bush Press Conference
European Issues - Turkey

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Catholic La Croix carries an op-ed signed by Ambassador Stapleton on the Afghan elections, largely forgotten by the French media, where Afghans quietly went about electing a legislature and provincial councils, and women participated in record numbers.

In unison, today's front pages and editorials are devoted to the aftermath of yesterday's day of social protest, with varying analyses, depending on the outlet. While the headlines note the large following in the demonstrations, which included the private sector, commentators ask what PM Villepin can do in answer to the social demands. Left-of-center Liberation contends that "the wide ranging social demands which lack concreteness make it difficult for the government to respond." Right-of-center Le Figaro notes that "Villepin, far from ignoring the message, acknowledged having heard the appeal. But the message is nevertheless ambiguous. The private sector harps on a loss of consumer buying power, whereas statistics show the opposite." Catholic La Croix shares this analysis in a commentary titled: "Mental Disassociation." Financial La Tribune in its editorial warns Villepin about a "too rigid attitude. PM Raffarin could afford to stand firm because he harbored no Presidential ambitions."

The opening of the negotiations in view of Turkey's EU membership elicits a wide number of reports and analyses. Le Figaro front pages: "Chirac Unbending on the Issue of Turkey." (See Part C) His press conference yesterday is also scrutinized, with commentators emphasizing his 'combative' attitude towards his own UMP party as well as the EU Commission "in the framework of the HP lay off plans in Europe." In this regard, Le Figaro Economie has a large spread about HP repatriating 14.5 billion dollars in profits to the U.S., "thanks to a temporary U.S. tax amnesty legislation."

Popular right-of-center France Soir interviews Didier Billon of the IRIS think tank on France's role in the EU-Turkey run-up discussions: "France did not weigh in very much in Luxembourg. France and its politicians were not very vocal. The U.S. has always supported Turkey's EU membership. But having said this, their interference is somewhat discourteous towards the EU."

President Bush's press conference is briefly mentioned in Le Parisien. (See Part C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

President Bush Press Conference

"President Bush's Problems"

Thomas Cantaloube in right-of-center Le Parisien (10/05):
"When a fire gets out of hand, it is always reassuring to see the chief fireman speak before the cameras. This was the strategy adopted by President Bush yesterday in his impromptu press conference in order to splash some water on the flames encircling the White House. With an approval rating of about 40 percent, the U.S. President has no choice but to be on the defensive. He spent a major part of the conference justifying his nomination of Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court. But avoiding the hard issues is not how President Bush will be able to scatter the black clouds hanging over his second term. For the umpteenth time President Bush spoke reassuringly - but against all evidence - about 'the situation in Iraq progressing.' But he was hard-pressed when it came to getting rid of the feelings that prevailed over the summer of being trapped, and which General Casey indirectly confirmed before Congress last week."

"Europe's Guardrails"

Jean-Christophe Ploquin in Catholic La Croix (10/05): "Europe is sending a message of universal scope by accepting, at least in principle, the idea of a Muslim member state. In this day and age when Islam is torn by fundamentalism, this is good news. But Turkey is not assured of joining the EU. Guardrails have been raised and the possibility of failure in the negotiations has been clearly included in the text. The EU must be able to absorb a new member. and the final decision will need to be ratified by all members. By signing with Turkey, the EU has honored its commitment, but after having implemented protective guardrails. The ball is now in Ankara's hands. The Turks are facing a daunting task."

"Running Ahead of Itself"

Patrick Sabatier in left-of-center Liberation (10/05): "The most surprising is that the reactions from both sides was: 'negotiations always end up with the country joining the EU.' This in spite of the guardrails of protection inscribed in the negotiations' criteria. Not surprising then if, in the face of so much resignation, skepticism and mistrust towards Europe's expansion are growing. It would have been nice to say that the process followed a visionary strategy. Unfortunately it was the result of bartering in favor of Croatia and the need to avoid another EU failure. There was no room made for a debate about Turkey. A much needed debate to keep the EU from dissolving and becoming a vast free trade zone."

"Two Weddings and a Funeral"

Sylvie Goulard of Sciences Po in left-of-center Liberation (10/05): "Austria's Ursula Plassnik was not strong enough to resist. She finally had to cave in. Great Britain's presidency comes out triumphant. Condoleezza Rice, who pulled the strings from Washington, can be satisfied. The so-called 'visionaries' who are only trying to avoid a 'clash between civilizations,' the 'modernists' and the 'good guys' have won. The 'retrogrades' who favor a small-minded and necessarily Christian Europe, 'the bad guys' have lost. But Ursula Plassnik did Europe a great favor. She was our minister, the only spokesperson for about 230 million Europeans who are hostile to Turkey's membership. Ten or one hundred years of negotiations will not be enough to make Turkey a European country without boundaries with Iran and Iraq. Many Europeans legitimately oppose the idea of Europe going that far. Turkey and Croatia will join a defunct EU." STAPLETON